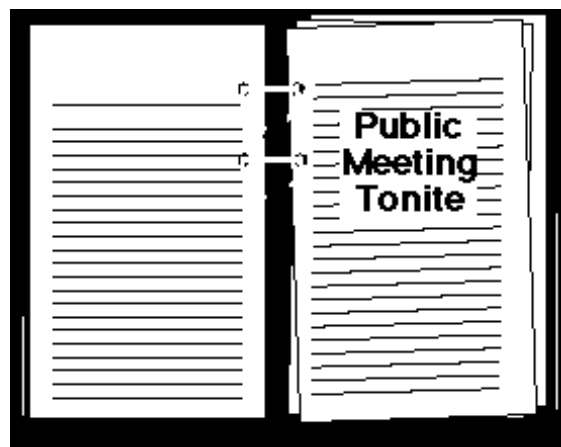


## Activity 11

# What the Community Can Do



Duration	2 class periods
Grade Level	7-12
Key Terms/ Concepts	Administrative Record Community Involvement Information Repository Superfund Technical Assistance Grant (TAG)
Suggested Subjects	Social Studies Civics/Government Drama

## Purpose

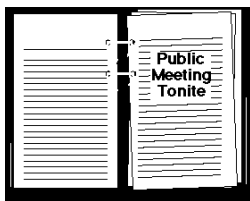
Students become familiar with how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tries to encourage communities near Superfund sites to become involved in the Superfund process. The types of activities communities can undertake to influence how hazardous waste sites are cleaned up are presented and discussed. Students become familiar with the different ways EPA encourages the community to get involved and the role of the local community in the Superfund process.

## Background

**Community Involvement** is an essential part of all Superfund actions because the Superfund Program was established to protect the public's right to a safe, healthy environment free of dangerous hazardous waste sites. In addition to identifying the public's concerns and trying to address them, EPA and state and local environmental officials encourage groups of local citizens to become actively involved in determining the future use of contaminated sites.

EPA has always recognized the public's interest in hazardous waste management and its right to participate in the Superfund process. The law that created the Superfund Program requires a community involvement program at Superfund hazardous waste sites. This means that EPA must conduct specific activities to provide opportunities for public participation.

For more information on community involvement, see the brochure *This is Superfund* and the Suggested Reading list found at the end of the Haz-Ed materials. Other Haz-Ed materials that are related to this topic include *Fact Flash 2: The Superfund Cleanup Program* and *Activity 9: Making Decisions About Hazardous Waste Cleanup*.



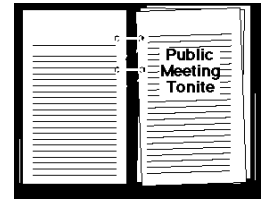
## Preparation

1. Gather the following materials:
  - Copies for each student of  
*Fact Flash 3: Flowing Railroad Hazardous Waste Site*  
*Fact Flash 10: Superfund Community Involvement Program.*
2. Read Fact Flash 10 and review *Activity 9: Making Decisions About Hazardous Waste Cleanup* to prepare your lecture.

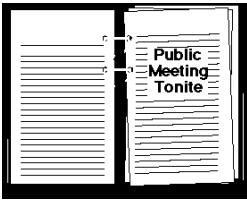
## Procedure

### Class #1

1. Begin the session by asking students who consider themselves “community activists” to raise their hands. Have a few of them explain what they mean by “activism” and why it is important to get involved in what goes on in the community. Also ask the students if any of them know of a Superfund site, and if so, whether they are familiar with EPA’s public participation efforts and the community’s response. If students volunteer some familiarity with the community involvement program or a site, have them share their knowledge with the class. The site may be local or may be one of the better known sites across the country.
2. Distribute *Fact Flash 10: Superfund Community Involvement Program*. Briefly review the opportunities for citizens to get involved in the Superfund Program and the examples of communities that have had a significant impact on the Superfund process.
3. Distribute *Fact Flash 3: Flowing Railroad Hazardous Waste Site*. Briefly review the main issues to be considered at the site. Explain that the class will be divided into groups for a role-playing exercise. Half of the groups will play the role of community residents near the site, and the remaining groups will assume the role of an EPA Community Involvement Coordinator (CIC). The Community Involvement Coordinator is responsible for developing, implementing, and managing EPA’s community involvement and outreach activities at a site. Tell the students that each group will need to select a spokesperson and that the spokesperson will be expected to speak for about 5 or 10 minutes at a future class period about what their group decided to do in their role as an EPA CIC or as community residents.



4. Divide the class into groups and assign their roles. *(NOTE: The number of groups may vary, but each should include about 5 or 6 students.)*
  - The groups playing community residents are to develop an “action plan” for influencing the cleanup decisions at the hazardous waste site. Their plans should identify activities they can undertake, as well as activities they would like EPA to undertake to inform them about what is happening at the site. Instruct the group to explain how they would implement the activity. For example, if they choose to form a task force to monitor EPA’s activities and to make recommendations, the students must explain how they would form a task force, who would be a member, how often the task force would meet, and what issues it would address.
  - The groups playing an EPA CIC are to develop a community involvement plan that identifies steps that EPA will undertake to involve the community in site decisions and activities. Their plan should state the goals of the community involvement activities, the specific activities, and when the activities would be conducted. Remind this group that EPA is required to undertake certain activities by law. As part of this process, these groups will need to consider what information they can obtain from the community and how they can obtain this information. For example, they can interview residents door-to-door or ask residents questions at public meetings.
5. For the last 10 to 15 minutes of the period, tell the students to meet with their groups to discuss their assigned roles and tasks. Remind them that each group will give a 5- to 10-minute presentation on their assigned topic for the next class. The class period for the presentations should be scheduled 1 or 2 weeks after the initial assignment is made.
6. Encourage group members to discuss among themselves how best to accomplish the assigned task, make contact with appropriate sources of information, conduct interviews, compile information, structure a presentation, and prepare to answer questions posed by other students. Below are some resources the students could use:
  - **EPA Regional Community Involvement Coordinator (CIC).** By contacting the EPA Regional CIC for your state (see *This is Superfund* brochure), students can identify a nearby Superfund site or one within the state that they can research. Information can be collected from the Regional CIC or from a Superfund Information Repository. Each Superfund site has a local Superfund Information Repository nearby. Typically, these repositories are at a public library. The Repository contains the Community Relations Plan and other community outreach materials.



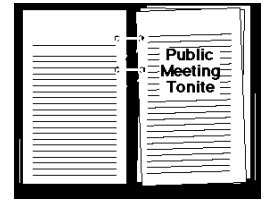
- **Local, State, or National Environmental or Citizen Groups.** Groups concerned with hazardous waste management or the cleanup of a specific site are an excellent source of information. For example, students can contact a local chapter of a national group, such as the Sierra Club, or a local activist group concerned with a specific site. Students should be able to find out about how other communities successfully influenced EPA's efforts at a site and get ideas for their own plans.

## Class #2

1. Have each group give its presentation and allow other students to ask questions. Ask group members what problems, if any, they encountered in preparing their presentations. Ask if they learned anything or met any people who were particularly surprising or interesting.
2. The discussion session should be interactive. Facilitate the discussion by asking both the presenter and the class questions. How do the suggestions from the groups representing the community residents differ from those of groups representing the CIC? Ask the class to explain the differing viewpoints and come up with ways to reach a common understanding.

Some questions the class might consider include:

- Are residents concerned that a major employer is responsible for site cleanup and that this liability may result in financial problems for the company or the community? If so, residents may oppose EPA's efforts to clean up the site and pressure EPA to permit the company to do the minimum, rather than undertake an expensive cleanup remedy.
- Is the community concerned about the future use of the site? If so, the community may oppose site cleanup remedies that restrict future use and instead recommend solutions that will permit the community to either develop the property or create recreational facilities. Something like this happened at the Chisman Creek Superfund site in Virginia. Initially, the proposed site cleanup plan recommended that the site be fenced and use of the property be restricted. Local residents, however, had previously used the site for recreational purposes, such as motorbiking, walking, and fishing. Consequently, local residents objected to building a fence around the site. EPA worked with local government officials and the Potentially Responsible Party to convert the site into a county recreational facility with softball and soccer fields after cleanup. The facility now is equipped with field lighting, a parking lot, and restrooms.



- Do any non-English speaking people live in the community? If so, EPA needs to develop a community involvement strategy to reach out to this segment of the community as well.
- What else can EPA do to promote community involvement, particularly if the community does not seem interested?
- What are some innovative, creative, or unusual public participation activities EPA could do to increase community awareness and involvement? For instance, EPA could sponsor a radio talk show or local television cable show to answer questions about the site.

Conclude the class by describing a nearby site and asking if the site or the surrounding community has any unique characteristics that would require a specific type of outreach activity. For example, if the community is predominantly Hispanic, all of the site documents must be translated into Spanish. Or, if the site is located in an area where there is one primary employer, citizens may oppose EPA's presence at the site out of fear that the employer will be forced to go out of business and they will lose their jobs. In such a case, EPA efforts need to focus on relieving these anxieties.

## Extensions (Optional)

- Consider inviting an EPA or State Community Involvement Coordinator who is involved in overseeing public participation efforts at hazardous waste cleanup projects to attend the second class period, hear the presentations, and share with the class his or her own experiences (see the Contacts and Resources section at the end of the Haz-Ed materials for EPA and state contacts).
- Consider inviting to the second class period a community activist who lives near a hazardous waste site to describe his or her experiences related to the cleanup of the site.

